

## The Strolling, Viewing, and Producing Character of the Modern City: *The Flâneur*

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the concept of *flâneur*, which had largely emerged from the works of Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, and attempts to reveal the level that this concept has echoed through the contemporary period. Flâneur is accepted as a teaching metaphor on the point of modernity's relationship with urban living; therefore, it can serve the function of a tool in the social, historical, and theoretical explanations regarding the world today. Studies revolving around flâneur have been published in a wide variety of fields. This study will discuss *flâneur* over "strolling", "viewing", and "producing", which come at the top of the elements of city life that are as inevitable as much as they are also changing and transforming. Discussion around flâneur that will interest many of the social science disciplines and those working in these fields are examined in the context of the literature that has been developed.

**Keywords:** *flâneur* • city • strolling • viewing • producing • Baudelaire • Walter Benjamin

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After the Industrial Revolution, migration to cities at central points had caused city life and social relations to radically change; individuals' daily lives began to consist of work and free time. Individuals in industrial societies began to work at a business and to also assess the hours apart from work as free time. Various debates were made about free time and the newly developing situations, and quite a few opinions were determined related to what it was and the things it covered.

One of the concepts developed in the framework of the debates conducted on free time is idleness. The characters of the people who were embodied through their "profession" with idleness are bohemian, dandy, and *flâneur*, and these three characters are the heroes and artists of city living according to Baudeliere (Demirkıran, 2017, p. 109).

Bohemians have been defined as "those who continue one's life by wandering and who have no worries about tomorrow" (Rey & Rey-Debove, 1983, p. 195), "They have a day-to-day, care-free, and roguish life" (Türk Dil Kurumu, n.d.), and "generally a person or community from the art and literature environment" (Püsküllüoğlu, 2004, p. 316).

Using Baudelaire's definition, the dandy, who resembles the bohemian yet differences exist between them or one can be considered a continuation of the other, is the "rich, idyllic man who, despite all his boredom, has no other pursuit than to maintain the trace of happiness; is the man raised in luxury who is used to conforming to other peoples' self since youth; this man, who has no other profession than elegance, possesses an elite and completely different physiognomy at all times" (Baudelaire, 2013, p. 233).

The *flâneur*, the urban figure of the modern capitalist period, being an important concept for the social sciences and modernity, confronts us as the first wanderer of the modern city. The *flâneur* has been defined as "a man who aimlessly wanders in the modern city observing the people and events" (Woolf, 1985), "the one with abundant free time and money for wandering around the city looking left and right, the saunterer" (Bowlby, 1992), and "an excellent independent observer" (Parsons, 2000).

The *flâneur*'s locale is firstly passages. As Benjamin (2018, p. 131) stated, "If passages had not been made, the prominence that wandering as a *flâneur* gained would in any case be very difficult." Through the realization of Paris' urban modernization, the city, streets, and passages where crowds flocked would become a unique opportunity for the *flâneur*. For the *flâneur* who "went out to gather plants for the purpose of inspecting the asphalt road," the locale was the wide streets, and the streets achieved the identity of an "interior space." The final marketplace of the *flâneur*, who walked and observed among the wide streets, sidewalks, and storefronts of the city like a maze, was the great stores. Benjamin (2002, p. 451) states that, as such, the *flâneur* would transform into the sandwichman.

### Regarding Strolling, Viewing, and Producing

With reference to Simmel, Tandoğmuş (2012, p. 103) makes this determination: “Humans in big cities proceed by just looking and viewing without talking to one another.” In this case, every person on the street can be expected to be a *flâneur*. The criterion that enables the city person who proceeds “by viewing” to be or not be the *flâneur* is production, because “*Flânerie* should be contained within the activities of observation, reading, and text production” (Frisby, 2015, p. 82).

Bauman constructs *flâneurs*’ activities as a game. For Bauman, the pleasure of wandering the city is the pleasure of playing games. “Wandering aimlessly and stopping to look around from time to time can be said to be the ultimate game” (Bauman, 2011, p. 206). Idle wandering (*flânerie*) means playing the game of playing a game (Bauman, 2011, p. 210).

The *flâneur* looks up and around, checks left and right, and walks non-stop. Strong legs are the basic requirement; however, the eyes are the most important necessity (Ferguson, 2015, p. 27). Observation is the reason *flâneur* exists (*raison d’être*; Shields, 2015, p. 65). Benjamin explains the *flâneur*’s state related to looking, watching, and observing as:

The dominant element in the *flâneur* is the pleasure looking gives. This looking draws out the amateur detective when focused on the level of observation; when the same look remains limited to looking without understanding anything, the *flâneur* turns into a *badaud* (an idle person staring at a place blankly; Benjamin, 2018, p. 163).

“The thing the *flâneur* masters is the art of seeing without the glances being caught” (Bauman, 2015, p. 141). *Flâneurs* have no strategy nor plan their behavior. This urban wanderer, who goes wherever the road takes him, performs his art with the air of an ethnographer by observing everything (Tandoğmuş, 2012, p. 103). Walter Benjamin (2018, p. 148) specified that the job of the *flâneur* is to wander around by assuming the identity of one without power (perhaps by hiding in one’s identity); in this way, the *flâneur* protests the division of labor and those running in pursuit of the work force.

*Flânerie* can be more than just watching (Tester, 2015, p. 18). In Benjamin’s studies, the *flâneur* and the activity of *flânerie*. Therefore the *flâneur* is not just an observer or a decipherer but at the same time is a producer; (Frisby, 2015, p. 82); the *flâneur* can be a producer of literary texts, of explanatory notes, of stories and reports, of newspaper texts, and of sociological texts.

The *flâneur* is a poet who observes the capitalist city and its daily life and who writes their observations as prose (Mazlish, 2015, p. 47). Baudelaire, whom Benjamin constantly referred to while depicting the *flâneur*, is also just such a character. The main

function of the *flâneur* is to view the city and produce useful descriptions by perceiving and interpreting society (Nuvolati, 2014, p. 24). In the *flâneur*'s activities, which focus on strolling, viewing, and producing, strolling is an aim for seeing the people, storefronts, and streets; viewing is an aim for examining events with the identity of an ethnographer or detective. The *flâneur* walks on the streets, in the passages, and on the sidewalks in order to produce works by observing the people, storefronts, and events.

## Results

So, does the *flâneur* exist today? According to Bauman, the *flâneur* has been defeated. Bauman opens the topic by making comparisons between shopping centers and streets and, by stating the streets to no longer be a "hunting ground" for the *flâneur*, describes the inner locale (shopping mall) as: "It's really great inside. It's exceptional. It's enjoyable, totally a place 'where you can wander around aimlessly while stopping to look around once in a while; whatever it is, it is a heaven for the *flâneur*.'" Bauman, who implies from the start that shopping malls are a new viewing place for the *flâneur*, immediately comes to his original purpose by giving his view in the completely opposite direction: "Or more accurately, it appears so. In reality, the new haunts among the walls are the locales of the *flâneur*'s ultimate defeat" (Bauman, 2011, p. 216).

According to Nuvolati (2014, p. 24), a strong relationship exists between the *flâneur* and the city. A person can only be the *flâneur* of their own city. Every city needs a *flâneur* who will observe it in order to better understand its spirit (*genius loci*). Baudelaire's hero is indistinguishable from a man in the crowd in Paris, and Poe's hero is indistinguishable from a man in the crowd in London.

The acts of strolling and viewing can also bring us to the character of a tourist or traveler. Establishing a relationship between the *flâneur* and the tourist or traveler is possible. However, both the way that Benjamin took Baudelaire into consideration with Paris as well as the many studies that were done later show that a strong bond exists between *flânerie* and the city. The pleasure of viewing, strolling, and maybe producing that also exists in traveling does not show it to be the same as the *flâneur*, which is a modern urban figure. The *flâneur* and the city are inseparable. Nuvolati (2014, p. 27) used the following statements while citing Bachelard: "You can be the *flâneur* of your own city; you don't need to travel a lot; looking at the city differently and leaving yourself to reverie is enough."

Despite the despair of Benjamin (2002, p. 451), who stated "The last living example of the *flâneur* is the sandwichman,"<sup>2</sup> if one is to look for the *flâneur*, one must look

2 Sandwichman is the name given to the guy who wanders the city carrying signboards hung from the shoulders in front and in back. Benjamin stated that no real *flâneurs* remained by using the characterization of sandwichman.

in the city. Every city has its own unique streets, sidewalks, passages, storefronts, and people; in short, its own crowds. A *flâneur*, who observes unseen, walks at the speed of a turtle, and produces various works, lives within these crowds – if he hasn't turned into a sandwichman.

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